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By James Lynch

Legislation including a provision backed by Rep. Bruce Braley to include Veterans Administration facilities in the National Health Service Corps was approved by the U.S. House Wednesday.

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, a bill that provides support for family who care for disabled veterans, enhances health services for 1.8 million women veterans, expands mental health services and access to care in rural areas and relieves financial burdens for veterans who are catastrophically disabled, was approved 419-11. All five Iowa House members - Braley, Dave Loebsack, Leonard Boswell, Tom Latham and Steve King - backed the bill.

"In my office there is no higher priority than helping veterans and military families receive the compensation, benefits, and other services they have earned," said Braley, a Waterloo Democrat.

The VA is facing an increased and unprecedented demand for medical services today as aging World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans require more medical care and thousands of veterans are returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with serious physical and mental health needs, Braley said.

These key provisions in the Caregivers legislation will allow the VA to recruit more qualified mental health professionals, doctors, dentists and nurses, he said. The VA will be able to compete for National Health Service Corps funding.

The legislation passed today will direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transfer \$20 million to the Department of Health and Human Services to include facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs on the list of facilities eligible for assignment of participants in the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program.

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act will provide support services to family and other caregivers of veterans, including health care and a stipend for caregivers living with severely wounded veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, education about how to be a better caregiver, counseling and mental health services and respite care for family and other caregivers.

The bill also improves health care for veterans living in rural areas by expanding transportation for veterans to local VA hospitals and clinics through VA grants to local Veterans Service Organizations and expands VA health care services for women, providing up to seven days of care for newborn children and enhancing treatment for victims of sexual trauma.

Also Wednesday, Braley announced he is part of the House Quality Care Coalition, which is seeking to make evidence-based, quality care the standard regardless of location. The coalition will also continue to address geographic variation in Medicare reimbursement for seniors.

Braley was part of a group of more than 30 House members representing areas penalized by the current Medicare payment system who came together to achieve an agreement with the Obama administration to change Medicare reimbursement.

Medicare is responsible for providing health care to 45 million Americans.